COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE.

BULLETIN No. 121.

ADDRESS

OF

HON. JOSEPH W. HUNTER,

STATE HIGHWAY COMMISSIONER,

Delivered at Annual Meeting of State Board of Agriculture, January 28, 1904.

PUBLISHED BY DIRECTION OF THE SECRETARY.

1904.

WM. STANLEY RAY,
STATE PRINTER OF PENNSYLVANIA,
1904.

PREFACE.

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania,
Department of Agriculture,
Harrisburg, Pa., February 6, 1904.

At the last session of the General Assembly of the State of Pennsylvania, an act was passed creating a Department of Public Highways, authorizing said Department to co-operate with the several counties and townships of the Commonwealth in the improvement of public highways, and appropriating $6,500,000 to carry out the provisions of the act for the next six years. Hon. Joseph W. Hunter, State Highway Commissioner, was invited to address the annual meeting of the State Board of Agriculture, held at Harrisburg, January 27 and 28, 1904. Mr. Hunter, in his address, gave a complete exposition of the provisions of the act referred to, together with a full statement of what has already been done under its provisions, and the Board felt that it would be a great benefit to the public generally, and especially to the farmers of the State, to have the address published in bulletin form, for distribution by this Department. Accordingly, a resolution was passed, asking the Secretary of Agriculture to make such publication and, hence, this Bulletin appears.

N. B. CRITCHFIELD,
Secretary of Agriculture.

Address of Hon. Joseph W. Hunter, State Highway Commissioner, Delivered Before the Pennsylvania State Board of Agriculture, at its Annual Meeting in Harrisburg, January 28, 1904.

Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Pennsylvania Board of Agriculture:

I have attended with much pleasure and profit some of the sessions of your meeting. I have listened to the instructive addresses with a great deal of interest. I am a much better listener than talker. I lay no claim to being a public speaker, but I am deeply interested in good roads, and I appreciate the honor that you have conferred upon me by asking me to address this meeting of representative farmers of Pennsylvania. Some say agriculturists, but I prefer the word farmer; it is shorter; and an agriculturist may be a mere theorist, but a practical farmer is not a mere theorist. He gets down to hard pan every time. He wants to know what benefit is to be derived by a change from an old to a new method. He may be slow at times in making up his mind to accept proposed changes or innovations in his usual course of life, or in his way of doing things, but once his mind is made up to accept a proposition or change, such a cause has no stronger or more earnest supporter.

The farmers are the mainstay of the nation. They support and maintain us, and in no state or nation are they more progressive than in this great Commonwealth. We excel all other nations, except in the matter of good roads and easy methods of transportation, and in this particular I believe that in a few years we will be abreast of the foremost state, if we do not lead the procession, in the onward march of progress. Ninety-five per cent. of every load by railroad, steamship or express must be carted in a wagon or truck over a highway. It costs the farmers of the United States 75 per cent. more than those of Europe to market an equal tonnage of farm products over primary roads.

The question of Good Roads has been before the people of this Commonwealth for upwards of a quarter of a century, various attempts having been made to secure legislation in the direction of road improvement, and while we have been discussing the question

pro and con, neighboring commonwealths have had the courage of their convictions and for ten years past have been constructing good roads and to-day are enjoying the benefits derived therefrom. Notably is this true in the State of New Jersey, with upwards of 1,000 miles of improved roads; Connecticut, Massachusetts and New York with about 500 miles each.

It was not until the last session of the Legislature that an act, known as the Sproul Road Law, was introduced and passed that any substantial progress was made in this Commonwealth towards the construction of good roads. It is true that the Flinn Road Law, in which the various counties are authorized to take charge of, reconstruct and maintain township roads in townships that are too poor and upon the taxpayers of which the cost of constructing good roads would be an excessive burden, has been in operation since 1895, and in Allegheny, Northampton and Luzerne counties roads have been reconstructed under said act, but the total mileage of such roads is small. In traveling over the State I have heard considerable about poor counties and poor townships, poor townships in particular, and that it would be a long time before they could do anything towards helping construct good roads within their limits. When I have asked the reason for this, the reply invariably has been: "The assessments are so low and the people so poor that we cannot get enough money to keep our roads in repair now, let alone raising additional funds to build stone roads." When I have asked about the tax rate in these townships I have been told that it was ten mills, or one per cent., for road taxes, and in several instances the county rate was the same, on the assessed valuation. Now, this is all wrong. The method is wrong. Exceedingly low assessments work an injury to the property owner, the township and the county. Prospective purchasers of farm properties will not go into a township that has been advertised as being a poor township and brought into disrepute thereby. What is the difference to a taxpayer if he pays one per cent. on an assessed valuation of twenty dollars per acre, or one-half per cent., on a valuation of forty dollars per acre. I take it that the owner, the township and the county are all benefited by the higher valuation. You know the old saying: "Give a dog a bad name and it will kill him." If you allow your township to get a bad name, it is virtually killed so far as progress and improvement are concerned.

Another wrong that helps make a poor township is the working out of road taxes by the tenants or owners of the real estate against which the tax is assessed. Fifty per cent. of the tax levied for road purposes is wasted, or paid as a premium for idleness, and for which no value is given. All over the State the same plaint is heard: "We do not get value for our money expended on road

repairs." Macaulay, in describing the almost incredibly bad state of the roads in England in 1785, says: "It was by the highways that both travelers and goods generally passed from place to place; and those highways appear to have been far worse than might have been expected from the degree of wealth and civilization to which the nation had even then attained. On the best lines of communication the ruts were deep, the descents precipitous, and the way often such that it was hardly possible to distinguish in the dark the line of travel from the heath and fen which lay on both sides." I have no doubt but each of you can readily call to mind such a road in this State, that fits exactly this description.

Macaulay further says: "One chief cause of the badness of the roads seems to have been the defective state of the law. Every parish was bound to repair the highways which passed through it. The peasantry were forced to give their gratuitous labor six days in the year. If this was not sufficient, hired labor was employed and the expense was met by a parochial rate." "A change from this law was at length effected," says Macaulay, "but not without much difficulty, for unjust and absurd taxation to which men are accustomed, is often borne far more willingly than the most reasonable impost which is new."

Gentlemen, do you not agree with me, that we should set aside our old road system which is practically the same as the old English system that was condemned over a hundred years ago, when the present system of road improvements in that country was inaugurated, and establish a system that will enable the farmer and taxpayer to enjoy to the utmost the benefits derived from having good roads, besides giving value and having something tangible to show for the money expended? Not since the passage of our public school law has there been placed upon our statute books an act that so vitally affects all the people of this Commonwealth as does the act of 15th of April, 1903, and which is known as the "Good Roads Law." It is of especial interest to the farmers. Many of you are undoubtedly familiar with its provisions, but a hasty review of it may, nevertheless, be of interest to you.

The act may be divided into two parts, the first of which provides for the reconstruction of township roads, and the second, for maintaining them after reconstruction, and also the maintaining of other roads that have been already built in accordance with the best standards.

The primary move in obtaining State aid in the reconstruction of township roads should be made by the supervisors or township commissioners, who may petition the county commissioners to make application to the State Highway Department for the co-operation of the State in the reconstruction or permanent improvement of

any principal highway within the township, or any section thereof, which is used as a thoroughfare by the people of said township, and the neighboring townships, cities and boroughs, agreeing by resolution to assume, for said township, the proportionate share of the expense of said improvement. Should the supervisors or township commissioners of their own volition fail to take the necessary steps to secure State aid, as aforesaid, then the owners of a majority of the assessed valuation of real estate in the township, may present a petition to the supervisors or township commissioners requesting them to make the necessary application to the county commissioners. Upon receipt from a township of the proper application, it is the duty of the county commissioners to petition the State Highway Department to undertake the improvement of the highway or section thereof specified in the petition from the township, and authorizing the assumption by the county of its share of the expense of said improvement. Accompanying the petition of the county commissioners should be the petition of the supervisors or township commissioners, and an accurate map or plan showing the layout lines, profile and grade of such highway, and giving such other information as may be necessary to the proper planning of said road improvement. The county commissioners are to state the kind of material to be used or available for the construction of such road.

If the county commissioners neglect or refuse to act after the proper applications have been filed with them, the law provides for the appointment of a jury of view by the court of quarter sessions upon petition from the township authorities, and upon a favorable report from said jury, and with the approval of the court, it shall be the duty of, and the court may by order require, the said county commissioners to petition the State Highway Department for the aid asked for by the township.

Upon receipt of the application and plan from the county commissioners, it is the duty of the State Highway Commissioner, or his assistants, to make an inspection of the road for the reconstruction of which State aid is asked, in order to obtain data which can only be obtained by such personal inspection. A plan is then carefully marked out and estimates are made of the amount of excavation, macadam, etc., required. Copies of this plan, with the specifications, are sent to the county commissioners, who are required to advertise in two newspapers for thirty days prior to the time fixed for the opening of bids. The bids are received by the State Highway Commissioner, who opens them and afterwards submits them to the county commissioners and township supervisors or commissioners. If all the parties agree upon the acceptance of one of the bids, an agreement is then entered into

with the county and township for the payment of their respective shares of the cost of said work. After this has been done a contract is then made between the Commonwealth and the successful bidder, such bidder giving bond as required by law. Of any such contract the State pays two-thirds of the amount and the county and township one-sixth each.

During the progress of the work, it is carefully inspected and the final inspection is made by the State Highway Commissioner or his assistant upon completion of the work and before it is accepted by the Department.

The construction fund as provided by the act is apportioned among the counties in proportion to the number of miles of township roads in each county. This apportionment per mile to each county is a fraction over $4.58. No part of this fund passes through the hands of any person connected with the Department. It remains in the hands of the State Treasurer and is paid out by him upon warrant properly drawn by the Highway Department. Westmoreland county has the greatest number of miles of township roads, 3,644; York county next, with 3,598 miles, and Lancaster county third with 3,143 miles. Cameron county has the least mileage, 167. The total mileage of the State is 98,123 miles of township roads. There are 1,101 miles of turnpike roads in the State.

According to the square miles of area, York county has 4.1 miles of public roads; Lehigh county, 4.07 miles and Montgomery county 4.01 miles. The distribution of the fund apportioned to a county will be determined by the county commissioners. Just how they will do this I cannot say, but in some cases I have suggested that the distribution be chronologically; that is, the applications to be taken up in the order in which they were filed with the commissioners and pushed to completion in that order. Possibly in some instances, the commissioners may decide that a particular application, owing to circumstances, may have a priority over preceding ones. This will be a matter wholly for them to decide. There is no direct apportionment by the State to a township, of any part of the construction fund. The money apportioned to a county remains at the disposal of that county for a period of two years, and if not called for or used in the reconstruction of township roads within that time it is returned to the State Treasury, and added to the appropriation for the current year, and distributed anew among all the counties.

The maintenance fund available each year is ten per cent. of the amount appropriated and also remains in the hands of the State Treasurer until paid out upon warrant of the Highway Department. This fund is apportioned by the State Highway Department among the townships and counties applying for the same, in

proportion to the mileage of improved highways made under the provisions of this act, or which have already been made or may hereafter be made, at the expense of such townships or counties, and which are of the standard prescribed by the State Highway Department for improved roads.

Section 16 of said act, which I will read, gives the method to be observed in making application for a share of the maintenance fund.

"Section 16. Whenever the supervisors or commissioners of any township or county shall desire State aid for the purpose of maintenance of improved highways, whether State highways improved under the provisions of this act or otherwise, it shall be the duty of said supervisors or commissioners to file with the State Highway Department, on or before the first day of April in each year, a sworn petition requesting such State aid, and setting forth the number of miles of highways improved according to the standards of the State Highway Department in said township, and the cost of the same to said township, together with the condition of said improved highways and the average annual cost of maintaining the same. The State Commissioner of Highways, if in his judgment the conditions warrant the co-operation of the State in maintaining said highways, shall apportion to said township its proportion of the total amount available for the maintenance of improved highways, as hereinbefore provided, and the said amount shall be paid to the supervisors or commissioners of said township by warrant of the State Highway Department; but in no case shall the amount thus given by the State for maintenance, be more than one-half the amount which, in the judgment and experience of the State Highway Commissioner, the annual cost of maintaining improved highways of the standard of construction prevailing in such township should be, nor more than one-half the sworn, average annual cost of maintenance, as set forth in the petition of the supervisors or commissioners of the said townships."

Section 22 provides that "County commissioners or county engineers of the several counties of this State, and the officers of all cities, boroughs and townships in the State, who now have, or may hereafter have by law, authority over the public highways and bridges, shall, upon the written request of the State Highway Department, furnish said Department with any information relative to the mileage, cost of building, and maintenance, condition and character of the highways under their jurisdiction, and with any other needful information relating to the said highways."

Some of the township and county authorities have been very dilatory and indifferent about furnishing information asked for; while

others have been commendably zealous in obtaining and furnishing to the department needed information.

The basing of the apportionment upon the number of miles of township roads in each county is eminently just and fair, but it has been a herculean task to obtain the reports of the mileage. In nearly all of the counties there was absolutely no record showing whether there were five or five hundred miles of roads in a township. The county with but five townships and the smallest number of miles of township roads is the only county that has failed to make a proper return of mileage as required by the law.

Section 23 of the road law provides as follows:

"All highways improved under the provisions of this act shall require the construction of a macadamized road, or a telford or other stone road, or a road constructed of gravel, cinder, oyster shells, or other good materials, in such manner that the same, of whatever material constructed, will, with reasonable repairs thereto, at all seasons of the year be firm, smooth and convenient for travel. The county commissioners shall have the authority to select the kind of materials to be used in improving any road under the provisions of this act. Any difference of opinion that may arise between the county commissioners and the township road authorities, as to the kind of a road to be built, shall be decided by the State Highway Commissioner. The State Highway Commissioner shall furnish to the county commissioners and township road authorities information as to the probable cost of improved highways, as defined in this section."

The cost of constructing macadamized roads as above provided for will vary according to localities and the proximity of good material out of which to construct them. In some sections of the State good material for road construction is exceedingly scarce. The qualities required in a good road stone are hardness, toughness, and ability to resist the action of the weather, and these are not always found together in the same stone.

Limestone possesses another quality; that of furnishing a mortar or cement-like detritus which binds the stone together and enables it to wear better than a harder material that does not bind. For moderate traffic the harder limestones are sufficiently durable and make the smoothest and pleasantest roads. For heavy traffic the best materials are trap, basalts, greenstones and cyanite. Roads constructed of these materials will cost from one to two dollars per running foot, according to the width of road bed, amount of grading and the convenience with which material can be obtained. The cost per lineal foot of one of the roads for which a contract is ready to be signed is one dollar and fifty cents ($1.50) and for another one dollar ($1.00).

Within a short time the present road law has been designated as a "gold brick," and a "snare" to the farmer. This sort of an assertion is erroneous and very misleading and should not be tolerated. A law that provides for the payment of two-thirds of the cost of a substantial and permanent improvement that will greatly benefit the farmer and further provides 50 per cent. of the cost of keeping said improvement in repair, is no gold brick nor snare. No taxpayer is asked to contribute to such improvement against his will except in the very small percentage of possible increase in his county tax, and probably the amount that most counties would have to pay for the reconstruction of a mile or two miles of a township road would not increase the county tax rate at all. Even should he have to pay a trifle more in taxes for having a good, permanent road over which to travel, he has something tangible to show for the expenditure. The farmers of this State furnish a capital of about $5,000,000 a year for the supervisors to go into business in the way of making so-called road repairs, and this sum is actually thrown away, and again subscribed for the following year.

Again, it is asserted that the act casts a grave reflection on the township and greatly disparages the abilities of its citizens to manage its own internal affairs, when it centralizes the expenditures of the money appropriated and puts the construction of good roads in the hands of an individual or under a department. This assertion is also wrong. There would be no general system of road improvement. There would be as many systems, standards and methods as we have supervisors in the State and the same would be liable to change each year. Just imagine turning the public school system over to the various township school boards. It would soon be "confusion worse confounded."

It is true to a certain extent that the farmers have been at the expense of keeping the township roads in repair for the benefit of travel that pays no part of the expense. But who uses these roads the most? The farmer; and unless he keeps them in repair, how is he to get to market to dispose of his produce? How is the merchant who sells him goods going to deliver them unless he has a means of access to the farmer's house? Why should the citizen or purchaser of the farmer's products be asked to or be required to pay for maintaining the roads that enable the farmer to get his goods to market and dispose of them at market price, any more than the farmer should be asked or compelled to help pay for the improved streets or roads in the city or borough in which he markets his wares, which he can do more quickly and to better advantage than if he had mud roads or streets to haul through. The taxpayers of a city or borough can with as much propriety say: "We will not improve our

streets because the farmers with their teams use them so much on market days and cut them up, keeping them in bad condition," as the farmer can say: "We will not help build good roads because the citizens drive over them and wear them out."

The present law gives the farmer the advantage of the county tax levied in cities and boroughs insomuch that no part of the county tax is used in the improvement of the roads in cities or boroughs except where a portion of a through or main road is in a borough, and the reconstruction of which will be the connecting link between roads already reconstructed or improved. There is reciprocity in the fullest and best sense of the word, in good roads. No farmer, citizen, taxpayer, State, county or township can afford to be without them. I believe with DeWitt Clinton: "That every judicious improvement in the establishment of Good Roads and Bridges in creases the value of land, enhances the price of commodities and augments the public wealth."

I have heard it said that the road law is a failure; it cannot be made a success; the farmers will have nothing to do with it. There is no question as to the fact that the farmers can make the law a failure or a success. A failure of the law is not and will not be, because the farmers appreciate the fact that it will be a great benefit to them and have decided to give it a fair trial and hearty support. The Department has had many difficulties to contend with and overcome and expects to meet and overcome others as we progress. It is no small task to establish such a movement, to build up the system from nothing. It was with a full sense of all that was involved that I entered upon the duties of the office. Since the organization of the Department, September 1, 1903, I have been in many parts of the State, attended meetings as called upon, and have found a very deep and earnest desire on the part of the farmers and other citizens to become posted as to the workings of the law. The Department has to this date received forty-six applications for State aid in the reconstruction of township roads, and one application from a county asking for aid in the reconstruction of a road that the county had originally taken under the act of 1895, and which had been destroyed by the severe rain storm of last October, making in all 47 applications. These applications aggregate 98.37 miles, the longest road applied for being six miles and the shortest 1,400 feet. These applications have come from all parts of the State: Snyder, Mercer, Crawford, Beaver, Lackawanna, Lehigh, Cumberland, Huntingdon, Delaware, Warren, Lycoming, Chester, Montgomery, Montour, Susquehanna, Clinton, Northampton, Northumberland, Berks, Greene, Bucks, Erie and Lawrence counties being represented, a total of 23 counties, or one-third of the whole number in the State, and I know of several more that are getting ready with their applica-

tions. Contracts are ready to be signed for the work in two counties, Crawford and Snyder. Bids are being received for the work in Lackawanna, Huntingdon, Clinton and Northampton counties, while plans are prepared and specifications being drawn for work in several other counties. Our office work is being retarded by the very crude plans and surveys that have, in many instances, been sent to the Department. With this showing, I am sure that you will agree with me, that it is very unjust to condemn our road law as a failure. With a little patience on the part of our citizens and the hearty co-operation of those interested in good roads, the Department will show that the law is not a failure, but an assured success.

I believe in the law. I believe what has been done once can be done again. I believe that if our sister states, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts and New York, have made a success of similar laws, that with your hearty and earnest support, Pennsylvania not only will make a success of our road law, but that in a few years she will be in the first rank of road making states, if she is not the leader of them all.

There has been criticism, and some of it justly. It is an easy matter to criticise, to find fault; but those who criticise and find fault very seldom have anything better to offer. We have the road law; it may not be ideal, but it is the very best that we have had and it will stand until a better one is passed. The sum appropriated under the law for road construction is said by some critics to be insignificant—a mere drop in the bucket. This may be true when compared with the whole amount of work to be done. It is a beginning. We cannot do all at once. No city was built in a day, no great work or undertaking completed without a beginning. The work of building, of reconstructing the roads in this Commonwealth is the greatest, the most stupendous undertaken by any Commonwealth.

The success or failure of this great undertaking depends on you. If you give it your hearty support and co-operate with the State Highway Department, you can demonstrate to the next Legislature the success of the law, and show by your action that you desire good roads and that you appreciate what has been done. I believe that beyond a question of doubt a larger appropriation will be made, the State pay a larger percentage of the cost of reconstructing the township roads and that real estate will be relieved of a portion of the burden of taxation that it is now bearing. If, however, on the other hand, you show by antagonisms that you do not propose to accept the benefits to be obtained under the provisions of this law, then there will be no incentive for the Legislature to make increased appropriations for your further benefit, but a possibility of a repeal of the present law. The burden rests with you.

Gentlemen, I depend on your aid in carrying out the provisions of our present road law. I consider you as my assistants, and I feel sure that you will not fail me and that I shall not be disappointed in you.

Will you do it?